

Who Will Be Ningthou?

a story from Manipur

written by Indira Mukherjee

illustrated by A. V. Ilango

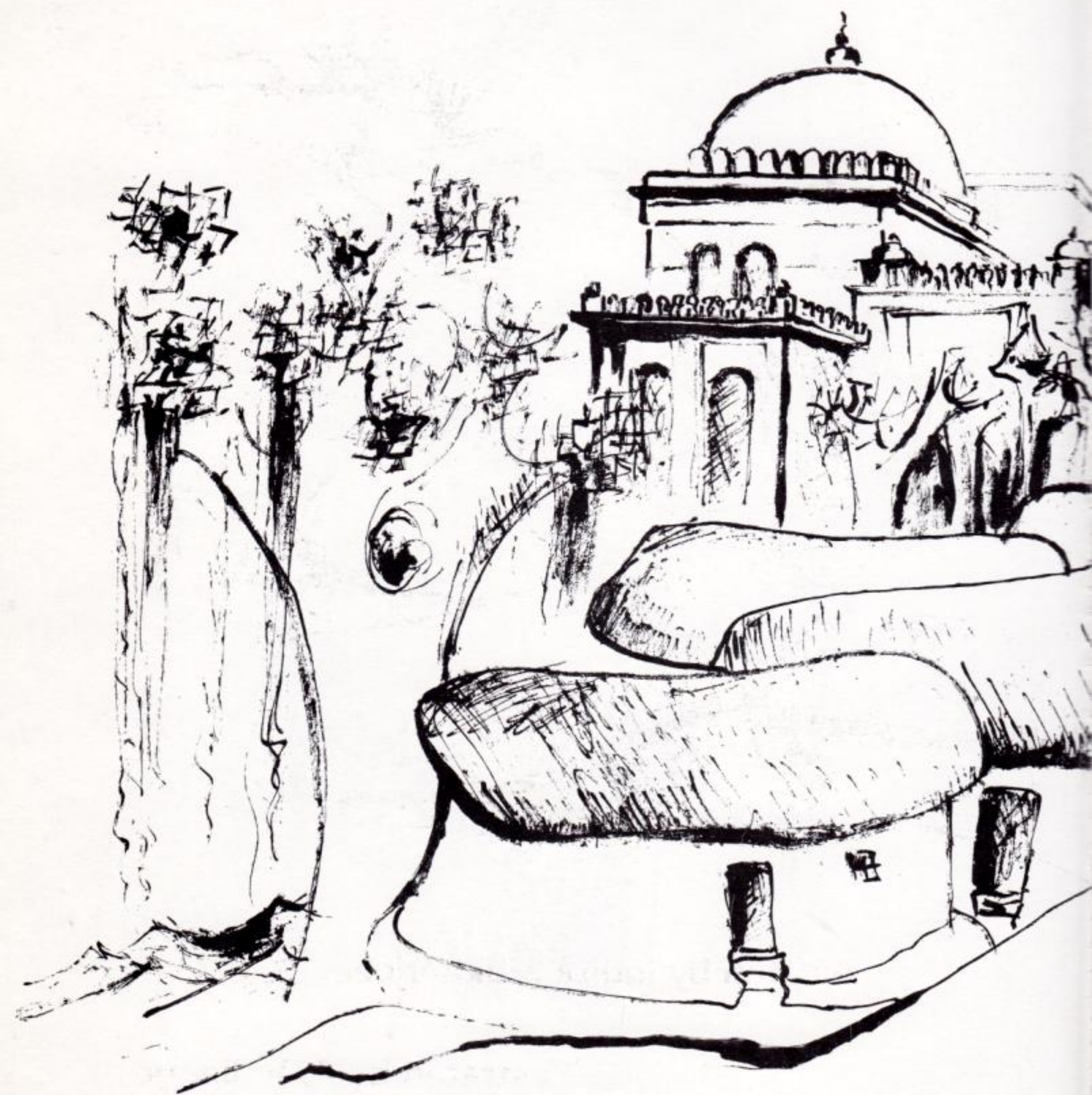


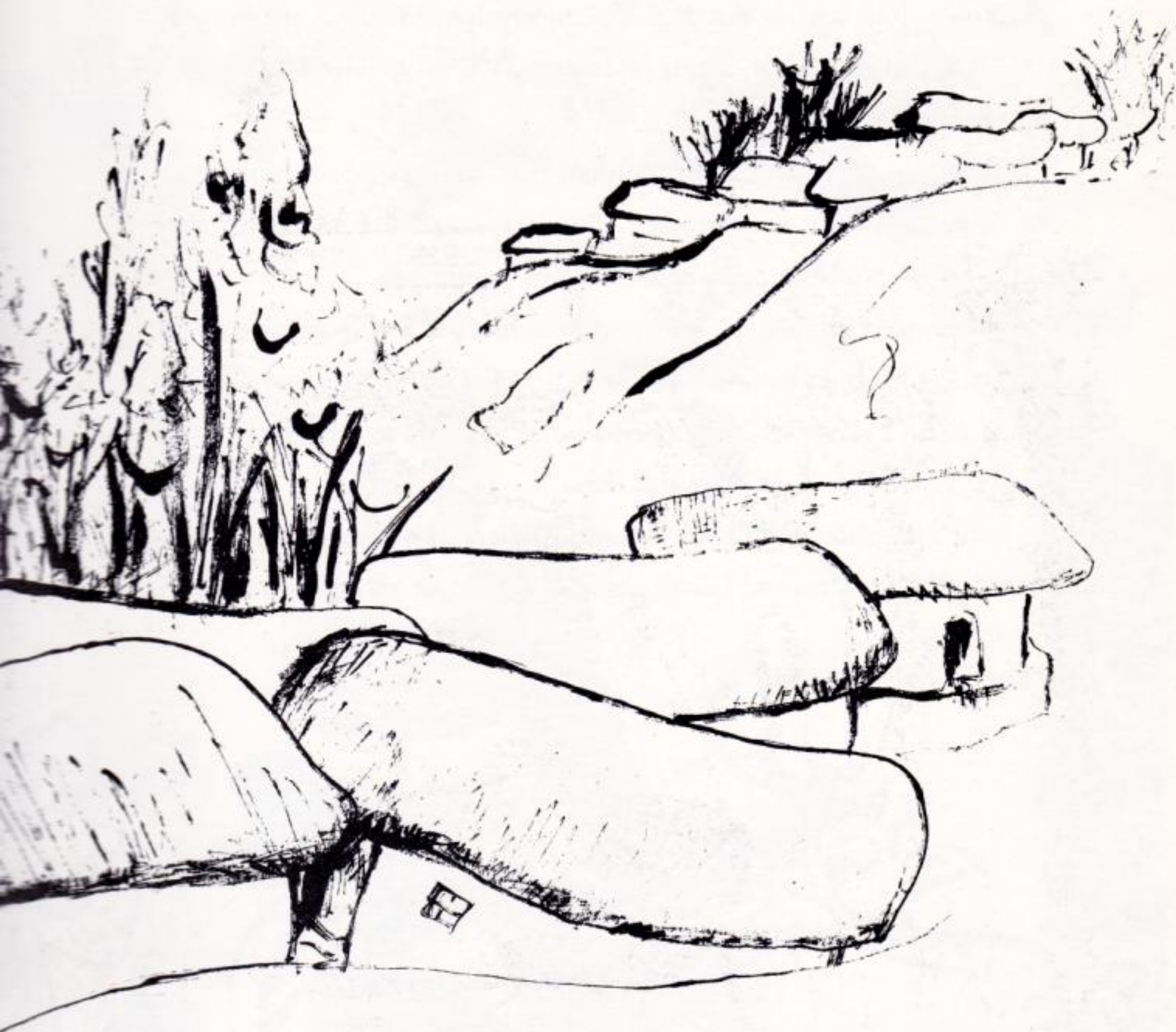


Who Will Be Ningthou?

a story from Manipur







written by Indira Mukherjee

illustrated by A. V. Ilango

Long , long ago, in the land of Kangleipak in Manipur, there lived a Ningthou and a Leima, a king and queen. They were loved dearly by their people.

The Ningthou and Leima, on their part, never stopped thinking about their meeyam, their people. "Our meeyam should be happy," they said. "There should be peace in the land of Kangleipak."

The people were not the only ones who loved their Ningthou and Leima. The birds and animals too loved them. The Ningthou and Leima always said: "Everybody in Kangleipak should live in peace. Not only the people, but the birds, animals and trees."

The Ningthou and Leima had no children. The people prayed: "Give our Ningthou and Leima a son, O Almighty, give them a son."





And then one day, the Leima gave birth to a son, a mochanipa. The people were very happy. They came to see their future king. They kissed the baby on his head and said to each other: "Mashak fajaba mochanipa, mashak fajaba mochanipa, a beautiful son, a beautiful son!" Then they danced to the beat of drums and played beautiful tunes on their flutes. They were so very happy.



They didn't know they would be celebrating the next year and the next. Yes, their Ningthou and Leima had another son. And another.

Now their beloved king and queen had three sons: Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba.



Twelve years later, a daughter was born. She was named Sanatombi. She was a lovely child, soft and beautiful inside. She was loved by one and all.

The years went by, and the children grew up well. And then one day, the Ningthou called all his ministers and said: "It is now time I name the Thungi Ningthou, the future king."





The ministers were surprised. "Why so soon?" they asked one another. They looked closely at their dear Ningthou. Yes, he had grown old. When they saw this, they were sad.

"It is now time to decide," the Ningthou said.

The ministers were shocked. "But O Ningthou, what is there to decide? Sanajaoba, your eldest son, will be our future king."

"Well," the Ningthou replied. "That's how it happened in the old days. The eldest son always became king. But times have changed. So let us select the one who is most worthy of becoming king."

"We will have a contest to select the future king," the Leima said. And so, in the land of Kangleipak, there was a contest, a horse race. Whoever reached the khongnang, the banyan tree, first would be declared Thungi Ningthou.

But then, a strange thing happened. Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba — all three of them finished the race together. They were expert riders and all three reached the finish line at the same time!

There was great excitement. "Look at them!" the people shouted. "Shagol thauba nupa, such fine horsemen!"

But one question remained: Who would be Thungi Ningthou?

The Ningthou and Leima turned to their sons. The Ningthou said, "Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba, you have proved that you are fine horsemen. Do something different, each one of you, so that we can decide who will be Thungi Ningthou."

The boys bowed to the king and queen, and to the people, and returned to their horses. They looked at each other and they smiled. But

all the while, Sanajaoba, Sanayaima and Sanatomba were thinking.

Suddenly, Sanajaoba mounted his horse and held his spear straight in front of him. He looked around. There was a hush among the people. "What is Sanajaoba, the eldest, going to do?" they thought to themselves.



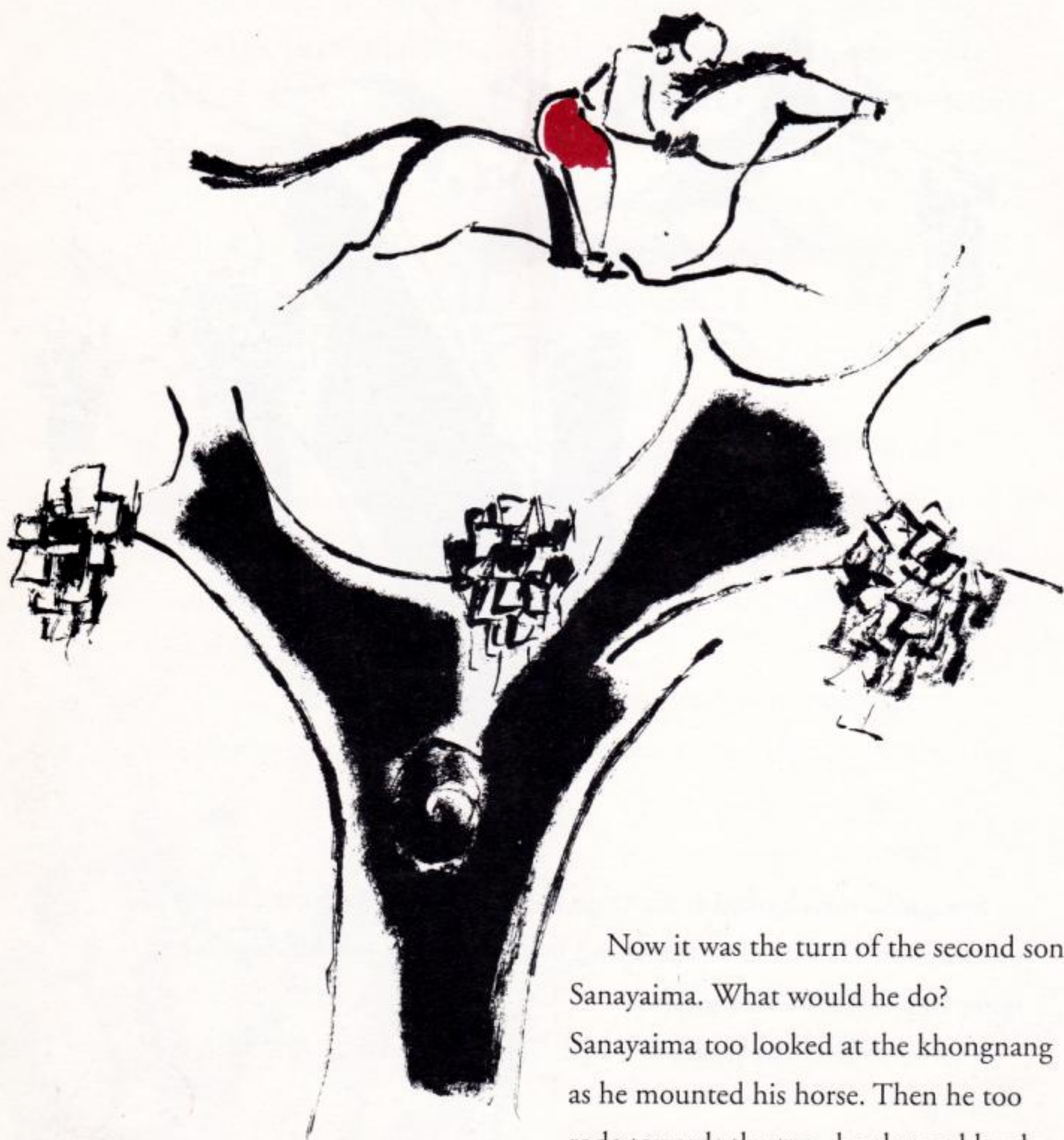


Sanajaoba then looked at the huge khongnang standing majestically in the distance. He kicked his horse and in an instant, it was off. It galloped faster and faster, towards the tree.

“Bravo! Bravo!” the people shouted. “Thauro! Thauro!” And then they fell silent.

Sanajaoba thundered towards the khongnang. Before anybody realised what he was doing, he pierced the tree and jumped his horse right through it!

“Thauro! Thauro!” the people shouted.



Now it was the turn of the second son, Sanayaima. What would he do? Sanayaima too looked at the khongnang as he mounted his horse. Then he too rode towards the tree, harder and harder. The people watched in silence, afraid even to breathe. When he was really close, he urged his horse to jump. Higher and higher the horse rose until horse and rider jumped clear over the huge tree and landed on the other side in a wonderful motion.

The people breathed in relief and said in unison: "Phajai! Phajai! Wonderful! Wonderful!"

And now, it was the turn of the youngest son, Sanatomba. He too rode his horse towards the khongnang and, before anybody knew what was happening, uprooted it. Triumphantly he carried the tree to the Ningthou and Leima and laid it at their feet!

Oh what a commotion there was! Shouts of "Thauro! Thauro! Phajai! Phajai!" filled the mountains.

Now you decide, dear readers: Who should be Thungi Ningthou?



Sanajaoba?

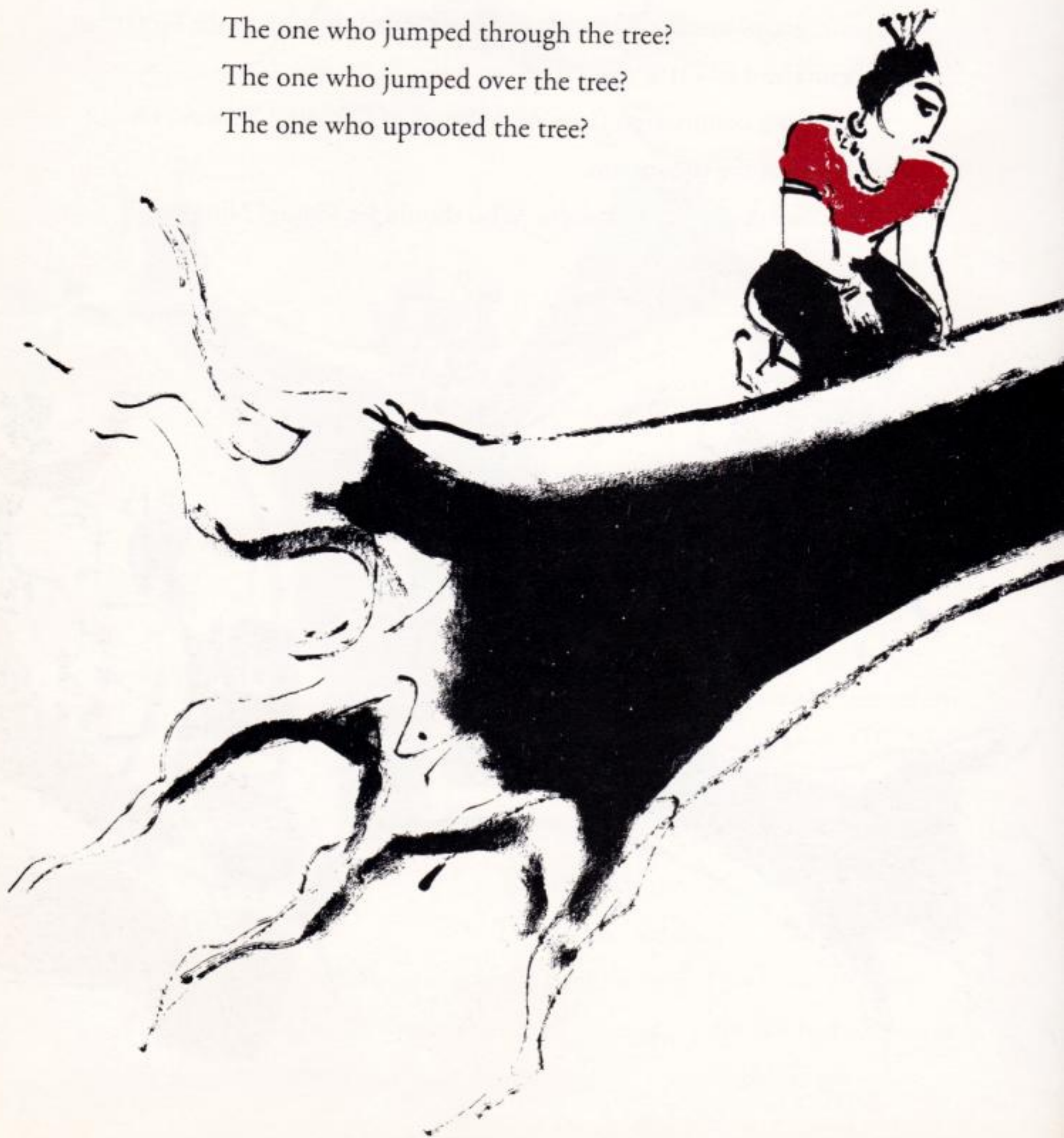
Sanayaima?

Sanatomba?

The one who jumped through the tree?

The one who jumped over the tree?

The one who uprooted the tree?





Most of the people wanted Sanatomba. Wasn't he the strongest of them all? Didn't he carry the huge khongnang as if it were a mere bundle?

The people grew restless. Why were the Ningthou and Leima taking so long to make the announcement? They craned their necks to see what was happening.

The Ningthou and Leima were watching Sanatombi, their five year old daughter. She looked sad and lonely. She stared at the khongnang which lay dead by the throne. Birds flapped worriedly around, searching for their homes in the tree. Sanatombi walked up to the khongnang and whispered, "The khongnang is dead. It was hurt by the spear and now it is dead."

A silence fell.

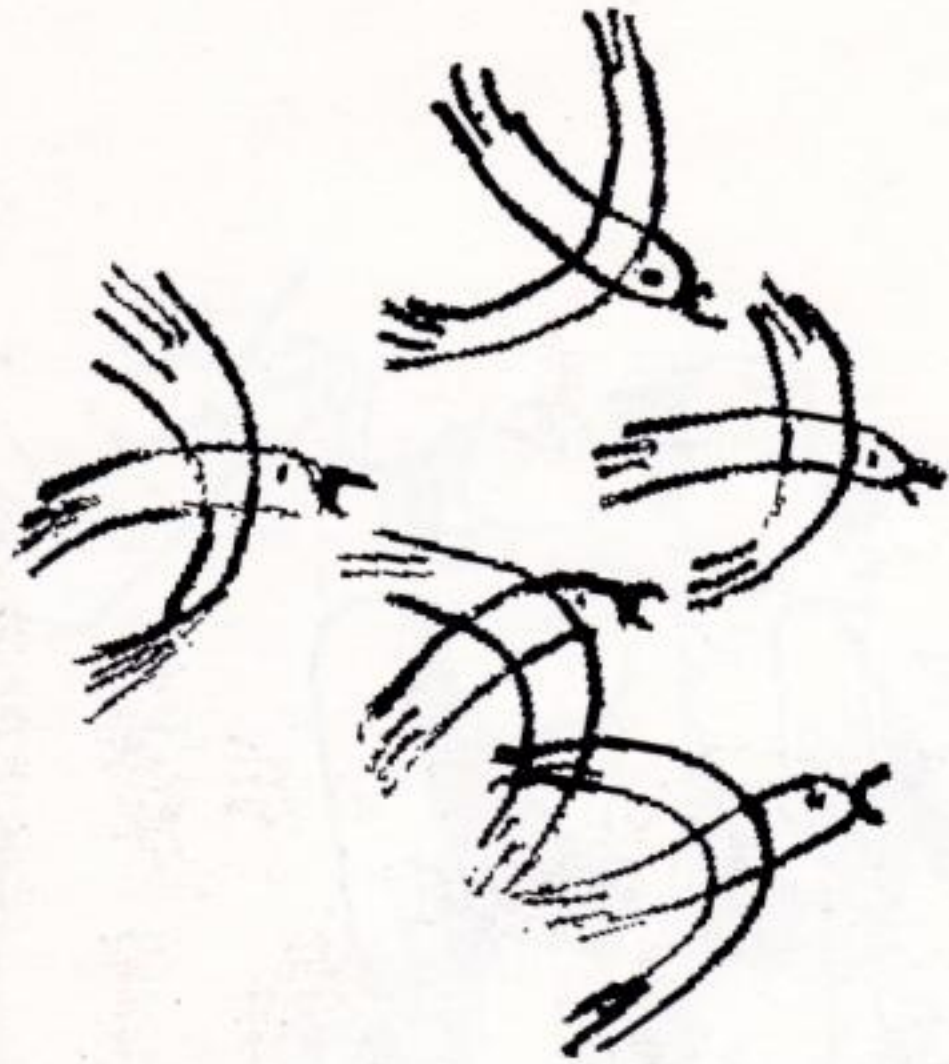
The Leima went to Sanatombi and put her arms around her. Then she turned to the people and said, "A Ningthou is one who sees to it that everyone in the kingdom is happy. A Ningthou is one who doesn't hurt anybody in the kingdom."





The people were all attention.

The Ningthou stood up. He looked at the three boys. He looked at the little girl. He turned to his people. "If anybody is worthy of becoming the ruler," he said, "it is little Sanatombi. It was she who felt the pain when the khongnang was hurt. It was she who told us to look at the soul of the khongnang. Sanatombi feels the pain of others. She feels the pain of the people, the animals, the birds, the trees."



“I declare Sanatombi the future Leima of Kangleipak,” the Ningthou said. Everyone turned to look at the little girl, their future queen. There she stood, all of five, like a small khongnang, with birds flying all around her. They sat on her shoulders and on her head. She held out her hands full of grain and the birds flapped about her, pecking at the food.



TITLES FROM TULIKA

Wordbird Books

Eecha Poocha – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Ekki Dokki – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

And Land Was Born – English

Forthcoming

Who Will Be Ningthou? – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Malu Bhalu – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

All About Nothing – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Kolaba – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Under the Banyan

Eyes on the Peacock's Tail – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Magic Vessels – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Hiss, Don't Bite! – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

A Curly Tale – English, Tamil, Malayalam, Hindi and Kannada

Bilingual Picture Books

Number Birds 1 2 3 – English/Malayalam, English/Tamil, English/Hindi

Line and Circle – English/Malayalam, English/Tamil, English/Hindi

Priya's Day – English/Malayalam, English/Tamil, English/Hindi, English/Kannada

Alphabet Books

Ka se kapde kaise – Hindi

Tamil alphabet book (*forthcoming*)

Who will be Ningthou? (English)

© Story – Tulika (1999)

© Illustrations – A.V. Ilango (1999)

ISBN 81-86895-34-5

Rs 120 only

This edition published in India 1999

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic or mechanical – without the prior written permission of the publisher.

printed and bound at

Anjan International Media, 93 4th street, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 600 018, India

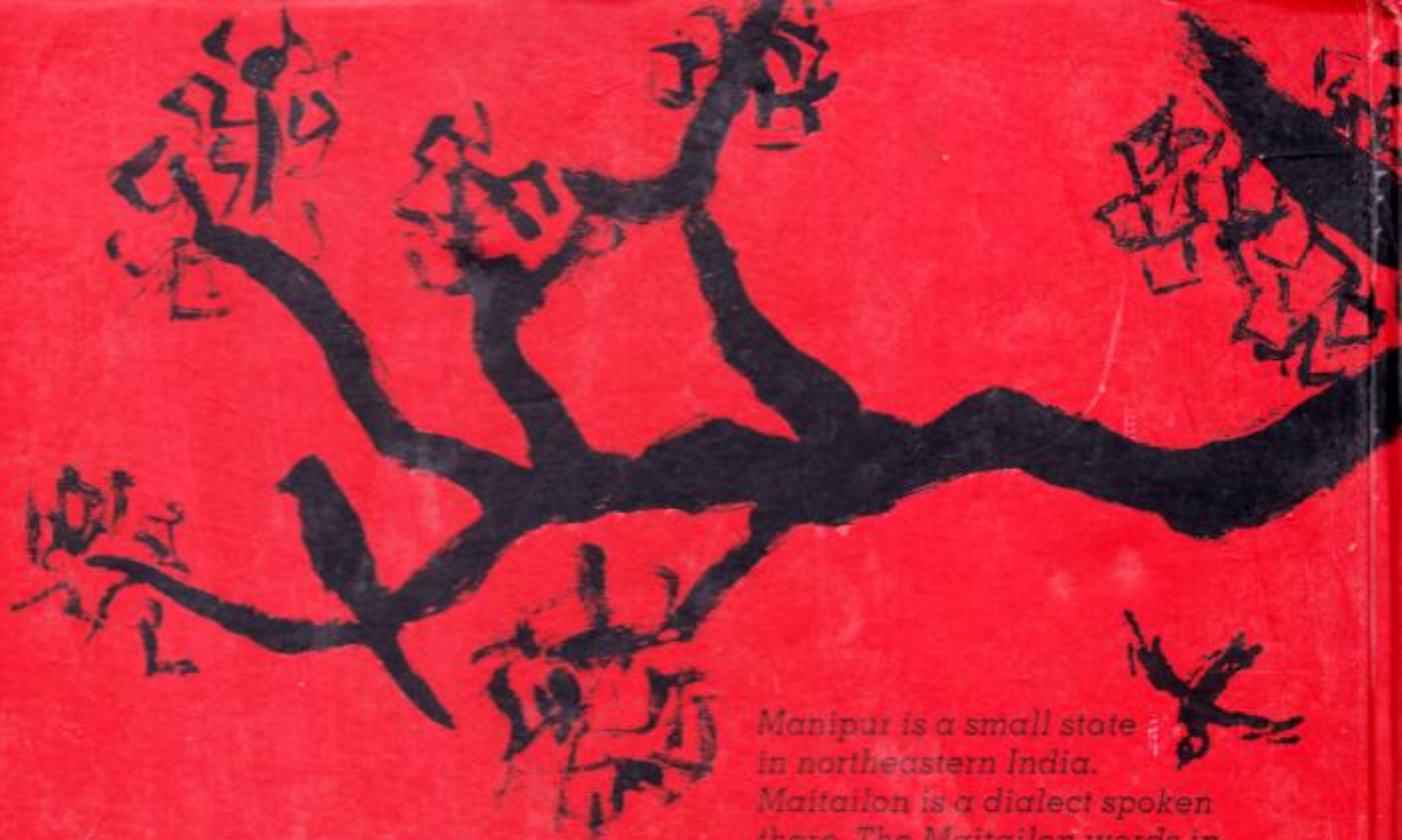
distributed by

Goodbooks Marketing Private Ltd, 7 Prithvi Avenue, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 600 018, India

published by

Tulika Publishers, 7 Prithvi Avenue, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 600 018, India

website: <http://www.tulikabooks.com>



Manipur is a small state in northeastern India. Maitailon is a dialect spoken there. The Maitailon words in the story give readers a feel of the place and its people.

Wordbird Books

This series features cross-cultural, cross-lingual stories published simultaneously in English, Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada and Tamil. The stories, sourced from the rich oral traditions and folklore of India and other regions, emphasise the similarities and differences existing in this, our one world. Unfamiliar words and ideas are explained with the help of Wordbirds which streak across the pages and the child quickly acquires a multilingual vocabulary. Wordbirds nest in all the books in this series, ideal for 4 to 8 year-olds.

The Ningthou and Leima, king and queen of Manipur, rule well over their meeyam, their people. The people are happy and live in peace. And then it is time to name a successor to the throne. A contest is held. Who is named the next Ningthou?

This charming folktale gently leads the child to think about two very important issues: harmony with nature and gender equality.

Indira Mukherjee is a writer and storyteller based in Delhi.

Well-known artist **A V Ilango** is also a Professor of Mathematics, and lives in Chennai. His paintings are striking for rhythm and motion of line.

ISBN 81-86895-34-5

Rs 120

